

Putting Passenger Rights in First Class Rep. Lloyd Doggett

Customer service on has been in a tailspin most of the year. In December 2006, one plane sat on the runway at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport for over nine hours. Austin is the "Live Music Capital of the World," and nine hours visiting our unique city should be fun. But not when you're locked up on smelly plane, baking on the airport tarmac. Now passengers are beginning to hold airlines accountable. Recently, I took part in the first ever "Strand-In" of airline passengers in our Nation's Capital. This event was designed to highlight the plight of passengers who have been locked up on planes for hours.

This aviation crisis is worse than stranded passengers and lost bags. Today, there are three types of flights: arrivals, departures, and cancellations. Despite news of increasingly more outrageous abuse of paying passengers, the response has been dithering, delays, and denial. Fortunately, Congress has begun to act. The U.S. House of Representatives has passed an airport funding measure that includes some modest consumer protections for airline passengers. This legislation requires airlines and airports to release passengers after excessive delays, and provide passengers with food, clean drinking water, usable bathrooms, proper ventilation and medical care during delays. These initial reforms are as modest as a bag of peanuts, but are a long overdue start in holding airlines accountable.

As a "Doggett," I know the difference between a lap dog and a watch dog - and a large part of the problem is that the Department of Transportation has shown the same indifference to the needs of the flying public as have the airlines. I have sponsored a more comprehensive set of consumer protections known as the Airline Passengers Bill of Rights. This stronger legislation would require airlines to monitor their chronically delayed flights and inform customers of the on-time performance of their flight whenever a customer makes a reservation or purchases a ticket. If a flight loses a bag, the airline shall make every reasonable effort to return the lost luggage to the passenger within 24 hours.

Travelers from Travis County deserve better than delayed flights and lost bags. I will continue to ensure that the Department of Transportation puts the interests of airline passengers first.